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ABSTRACT

Group processing after an outdoor experience provides feedback and the opportunity for critical reflection, which can enhance the benefits of the experience. This paper outlines some common problems in processing and suggestions to help outdoor leaders improve their facilitation skills. Common pitfalls that hinder effective processing include over-analyzing the experience, negative comments and feedback that offend other group members, too much talking by the facilitator, waiting too long after the experience, strong emotions, group members divulging too much personal information, and avoiding silence. Facilitators should be aware of their role, remind participants to speak only for themselves, respect each person's right to "pass" on discussion, help learners take responsibility for their own learning, and focus on group needs. Theories and models of processing include the "mountains speak for themselves" model, Outward Bound Plus, types of transfer of learning, and the metaphoric model of processing. The appropriate sequencing of the debriefing is discussed, and various techniques and activities of processing are listed that draw on multiple intelligences and diverse learning styles. (SV)

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PROCESSING FOR PICASSO AND OTHER MASTERS

Tammie Stenger
Beth Ryan

"Art is not the sideline: it's the essence."- Diane Montgomery

ABSTRACT: Everyone who has worked in the outdoors has seen both successful and unsuccessful group processing sessions. While it is relatively easy to successfully lead a group through technical outdoor skills, leading a group successfully through a processing session takes a little more finesse and artistry. Jane Panicucci (1999) said, "Artist facilitators are very conscious about their next brush stroke, considering what type of activity or framing or direction might be appropriate." This paper outlines some common difficulties in processing, and adds some suggestions to help outdoor leaders to develop into one of the great masters of processing.

Common Pitfalls

The group you are working with just got the entire group over a sixteen-foot wall. The participants are celebrating - all smiles and high-fives! So you gather everyone together and start debriefing this fantastic accomplishment. In less than three minutes, the general mood has turned from elation to boredom, indifference, or nervousness. What happened?

One possible culprit is ANALYSIS PARALYSIS (Gass, 1993), over analyzing the experience. The facilitator, who asks too many detail-oriented questions, generally causes this. At other times, the participants start going too deep on their own and the facilitator neglects to keep the discussion on track.

A second suspect is DISCOUNTING or KILLER STATEMENTS (Rohnke, 1989). Occasionally, participants will sell themselves or one another short and make comments that hurt or offend one of the other group members. As a general rule, only constructive feedback should be allowed.

Facilitators sometimes suffer "DIARRHEA OF THE MOUTH" and manipulate the entire discussion. When the leader does too much talking and doesn't allow group input, the participants tend to "tune out," leading to minimized ownership on the part of the group.

If you WAIT TOO LONG after the experience, the group may forget something, or they may have already dealt with a situation and have no desire to relive that experience. Try to process the experience as soon as possible after it ends, so that important issues are not neglected. If however, the group needs to satisfy more primary needs (e.g. bathroom, food, sleep) it may be beneficial to wait a little while so that the group can focus on the processing, not the rumbling in their stomachs.

If EMOTIONS ARE TOO HIGH, occasionally it is a good idea to give the group an emotional time-out, so that no one says anything that they will regret later. By waiting a little while, the participants can put the experience into a different perspective before

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discussing it. An important thing for facilitators to remember is that if you do take an emotional time-out, there are most likely some important issues that the group will need to resolve. Avoiding talking about the experience may cause problems to grow and fester, so gently guide the discussion.

In your quest to develop a team, sometimes we accidentally push the group members to divulge TOO MUCH PERSONAL INFORMATION early on in group development. Sometimes, when the group is working well together, they feel comfortable with each other and share personal information. Sometimes, this information leads the person who shared it to regret it later on. At other times, the facilitator or other group members may not feel prepared to deal with that news. Either way, it could lead to tension between group members.

In the United States, we are used to sound and are relatively UNCOMFORTABLE WITH SILENCE (Wyman Center, 1996). Because we are uncomfortable, we either ask a lot of questions or start rambling, or we move on to something else too quickly. Try waiting just a little while in silence after you ask a question.

Developing the art of facilitation requires patience and practice. Pay attention to the pitfalls and avoid them, but focus your attention closely on what you can do to improve your skills.

The Facilitator's Role in Processing

It is important to understand your role. When you are working closely with people, leading and teaching them, know what you can, should, and should not do. When you are setting the stage for processing, remind the participants to only SPEAK AS AN INDIVIDUAL (Wyman, 1996) not for the group. Each person will have a slightly different perspective on the activity, so it is important to respect each perspective. An important aspect of this is CHALLENGE BY CHOICE (Rohnke, 1989). We remember it well during physical challenges, but sometimes we forget the psychological challenge that comes with expressing an opinion. Always remember that each individual has the right to "pass".

When processing make sure that the LEARNERS TAKE RESPONSIBILITY for learning and for what they take from the experience (Wyman, 1996). You can help doing this by asking OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS periodically during the debrief. Remember to wait after you ask questions. SILENCE can be your best friend, because it gives the participants time to think about the question. Remember during processing to keep your FOCUS ON THE GROUP'S NEEDS.

Processing can be a useful tool. It can be used to:

- prompt thought
- keep the group on task
- intervene as needed

- ensure inclusion of all group members.

One of the hardest parts to developing into an artistic facilitator is keeping your own needs separate from the group's needs. Try to take care of your own needs before or after the experience, because it is hard, if not impossible to be responsible for others when worrying about yourself.

Once a facilitator has paid attention to avoiding pitfalls and understands his/her role, the next step is to understand a little more of the How's and Why's of processing.

Theories of Processing

Some people may wonder why experiences are processed. Experiential learning suggests that after an experience, if we critically reflect on the activity, we can derive some meaning from that activity, which can be changed or adapted and then applied to other experiences (Kolb, 1984).

The processing is often designed in multiple ways. Some people use the MOUNTAINS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES (MST) model (Gass, 1993), which essentially means that the participants reflect on the experience on their own and may or may not derive a lot of learning from the experience.

The most common processing model is the OUTWARD BOUND PLUS (OBP) model. This process involves the facilitator leading the group through a discussion after the activity (Gass, 1993). Although this type of processing is more reactive than proactive and can be difficult for entry-level facilitators, it does have many benefits and can serve as a basis for debriefing the Metaphoric Model that will be discussed later in this paper.

Learning tends to occur in the context in which it happens, which means that there are occasional difficulties with the TRANSFER OF LEARNING. Gass (1985) indicates that there are three major types of transfer: SPECIFIC, NON-SPECIFIC, AND METAPHORIC. Specific transfer means that skills learned in one situation can be used in closely related situations. Non-specific transfer involves learning general concepts that are used as "a basis of learning or behavior in a new, not-necessarily-parallel situation" (Hood & Lane, 2000). Metaphoric transfer also refers to learning principles and ideas for use in a new situation, but adds that these concepts are not the same in structure, but are similar or metaphorical.

In the METAPHORIC Model of processing, a good deal of effort is expended in framing or briefing the experience before it happens (Gass, 1993). This model suggests framing a concept to be learned by identifying parallels or similarities between the task at hand and tasks the participants face on a regular basis. Essentially this means, frame the concept to be learned into the context in which it will be transferred (Cross & Laidlaw, 1999).

Sequencing the Debrief

Debriefing is an important part of processing, and in many cases it is the only part of processing that is implemented. Closely reflecting the experiential learning cycle, is the most common debriefing technique, the "WHAT? SO WHAT? NOW WHAT?" method (Rohnke, 1989). The first portion, "What?" is a chance for the participants to reflect on WHAT happened during the experience. The second section allow the participants to answer the question, "SO WHAT did that experience mean?" At this point they look for insights, patterns, and personal meaning from the experience. Once the participants have derived meaning, NOW WHAT do they do with their new knowledge? This is the chance for participants define for themselves how they can apply their knowledge to future experiences.

Processing Activities

Gardner (1983) recognized that there are many ways of knowing and understanding. He identified the following seven MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES so that teachers could understand more about their students:

- Verbal/linguistic – words and language
- Musical/rhythmic – sensitivity to rhythm, beats, and tonal patterns
- Body kinesthetic – physical movement and body awareness
- Interpersonal – person-to-person communication and relationships
- Intrapersonal – inner states of being, self-reflection, metacognition
- Visual/spatial – visualizing objects, creating mental images
- Logical/mathematical – inductive and deductive thinking, patterns

Most processing models primarily use verbal/linguistic, and interpersonal strategies. Because people learn and understand in a variety of ways, and have different strengths and abilities, consider trying other techniques during processing. A few ideas include:

- Newspaper headline – have each person write a headline for an imaginary newspaper that is covering the experience you just finished
- Journal writing – give everyone a few minutes of quiet time alone to write in their journals with the option to share what they wrote with the group
- Use processing cards – have a variety of picture cards and let the students draw their own meaning from the activity
- Track pack - use specific objects to guide the processing
- Instant replay – break the group into smaller groups and have them pantomime or act out one small portion of the experience
- Drawing a picture - let the participants draw a picture depicting the experience through their eyes
- Sing a song - Have the participants think of a song that reminds them of the experience (either sing or speak the words)
- Hi and low of the day – participants share what they thought were the best and worst parts of the day

- The whip - short round robin - each person ends a statement such as "I really liked the way we..."

In order to for the participants to get new things out of the experiences, it's important for the facilitator to try some new things as well. While developing technique keep a few things in mind. Some groups take a while to open up, so there may be some resistance. Try to make the processing activity-centered. In other words make the experience connect with the debrief. Listen and observe closely, to stay in tune with the participants needs. Sequence the debrief to start with easy issues and work toward more difficult issues. In this way facilitators are more likely to get the group thinking and discussing and deriving more from their experience.

Facilitation is an art form, not an exact science. The techniques in this paper are tools designed to help train great Masters. Good luck, we hope your next art show is a huge success!

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